

First grind your buckwheat: the detox diaries

It was time for our former lifestyle editor **Hettie Judah** to reform her lifestyle

My friend runs a busy local shop with her husband selling organic products. She has two young children and recently took on an additional Saturday and Sunday job working at Le Pain Quotidien. She had every right to look and feel exhausted, but two weeks after starting her seven-day-a-week work schedule she was radiant, full of energy and looking about five years younger.

I was going through a low phase: my skin was the texture of semolina, my hair looked like dirty felt, I had cellulite that felt like pressed, over-boiled cauliflower, vast bags under my eyes from lack of sleep, jitters from caffeine, stained teeth from wine drunk to 'wind down' after long working days and an unshakeable aroma of stale cigarettes. I managed to get my friend to stop bouncing youthfully around the shop long enough to ask what her secret was. There was no portrait in the attic, and she hadn't sold her soul to a shady gentleman with a pointy beard and a surprisingly six-laden telephone number – instead she'd been following Taty's Anti-Fatigue Cure, and it evidently worked.

For those of you not plunged deep into the alternative culture of your adopted homeland, let me explain: Taty is a Belgian nutritional guru who advocates eating as little refined food as possible. She's appeared in these pages before, talking about the effects of

things like sugared breakfast cereals on children's behaviour and telling us that it's much healthier to cook with unrefined lard than margarine. Rather than extolling a one-size-fits-all philosophy, she suggests that different people have different nutritional needs,

and that with many people having adverse reactions to products like refined sugar and white flour, there really is only a minority of people who are fine eating as they wish. The *Cure anti-fatigue* is part of her series of books laying out an all-round approach to





For when you are feeling impure and mournful, lunch at Den Teepot makes a palatable form of penance. The restaurant is set above a busy organic grocery store, left, and keeps strict lunchtime hours. Although the cuisine is simply advertised as organic vegetarian, those trained in the wholefood arts will identify it as being vegan macrobiotic. The dish of the day €7.80 (there is only one, plus a miso soup with seasonal vegetables €2.50) is composed of about eight different preparations at the centre of which are two whole grain carbohydrates, typically brown rice with quinoa, millet or buckwheat noodles. The rest will be made up of a combination of raw and cooked vegetables, often dressed with Japanese condiments. Macrobiotic principles favour local, seasonal produce, so at this time of year there can be some scary encounters with Brussels sprouts and turnips, but the cooks usually manage to keep things surprisingly appetising. For the full experience you are meant to chew your food properly before swallowing, to eat slowly and consume only moderate quantities. You'll notice that many of your neighbouring customers spend a long time getting through their plates, and often eat with chopsticks, presumably because this encourages one not to bolt one's food. 66 Rue des Chartreux/ Kartaizersstraat, Brussels (centre), open Monday to Saturday 12.00 to 14.00, tel 02.511.94.02.

Photo: © The Bulletin

eating for health. It is designed as a twice-yearly detox. Ideally it would be taken as the seasons changed in the spring and autumn and should be followed for 10 days.

The next day I passed by the shop on the way into work and picked up a copy of Taty's book along with a *pain au chocolat*. "That pastry's not going to do much good for your anti-fatigue diet," my friend's husband told me jauntily as he handed me my change. I growled something about starting the next day, before dashing for the tram, dreaming of my first cup of coffee.

I think I am not alone in finding Taty's writing style irritatingly chatty and self-righteous, but once you wade

through all the exclamation marks and jocularities, the structure of the cure was relatively easy to follow. The banned list included wheat, sugar, any cooked fats, tea, coffee and processed soy products. The aim is to eat foods as close to their raw state as possible – sashimi, carpaccio, cold pressed olive oil, raw milk butter, lightly steamed vegetables, and lentils and beans that have been sprouted rather than boiled. Protein and starch should not be eaten together at the same meal, while fruit should not be eaten at lunch or dinner, and if eaten as a snack ought to be consumed with nuts or seeds.

It was Tuesday – in 10 days' time my sister was coming to visit and I'd

promised to take her out on a bender. After that came December and the invariable round of Christmas parties, Christmas itself and New Year, and there was no way I was going to make it through all of that without a glass of wine in one hand and a non-Taty-approved canapé ("Steamed quinoa gallette? Mmm, thank you Ambassador") in the other. If I was going to try this diet at all, I had to start it immediately. So for once, rather than prevaricate, I went for it.

The daily menu was rigidly structured – fruit plus nuts and seeds plus raw milk product at breakfast; raw or steamed veg, plus olive oil and a small amount of designated protein at lunch;

The cure isn't recommended as a sustainable regime



had worn off. I no longer had headaches, and the desperate hungriness had indeed gone. I felt healthier, I was more mentally sharp and had accidentally lost a little weight, but my skin was still dreadful and I still felt tired most of the time..

As the end of the regime approached I concluded that my bad skin was not related to diet or any of my vile habits and I made an appointment to see a

dermatologist. I was finding the diet relatively easy to stick to, but on Friday night my sister arrived and my first night off included champagne, red wine, steak, chips and béarnaise sauce all eased on their way with half a packet of Lucky Strikes. The rest of the weekend involved cheese, chocolate and plenty of drunkenness (plus more smoking). By Monday morning, my pure, serene alter ego had completely disappeared.

In retrospect, there are two keys to a successful detox, neither of which I managed. The first is forward planning – if you already have seeds sprouting, almonds soaking, and a selection of permitted condiments, the diet is going to be much easier and more interesting to follow. The second is sleep. Taty recommends that you go to bed early

during the cure, but for anyone with a busy life, that's not always easy.

Under ideal circumstances I have relatively healthy eating habits. It's only when I'm over-tired that I – like most of us – end up reaching for the *pain au chocolat*. I would like to try Taty's cure again in the spring, but she doesn't recommend it as a sustainable regime. In the meantime, it seems to me that the secret to staying in shape and eating well is not going on a diet or trying to make radical dietary changes, it's actually forcing myself to occasionally go to bed on time. My suspicion is that if I manage that, the rest will fall into place naturally. ■

Taty's *Une cure anti-fatigue* priced €8.48 is available from health food stores, or can be ordered online from www.taty.be



Tan is a kind of temple to the latest generation of healthy eating philosophies. Downstairs you'll find a shop full of organic seeds, grains, nuts, sea vegetables and hard to find components of a dynamic healthy store cupboard. At the back there is a selection of food preparation equipment for the seriously committed: the Rolls Royce of juicers which could virtually get blood out of a stone and that will set you back about the price of a small aircraft; desiccation equipment for raw foodists to 'cook' at ultra low oven temperatures; top class seed sprouters, and food processors that can turn almost anything into an appetizing purée. Upstairs, the restaurant is quiet and sophisticated, and it is definitely advisable to book. The clientele is mainly well-heeled Louise types (no cheesecloth shirts here) who presumably frequent the place as part of their quest for eternal life. The daily set lunch comes with a raw vegetarian starter, typically combining a large number of sprouting seeds and various vegetables, followed by a choice of two gently cooked main courses, one with meat, the other without. Eating *à la carte* one can have an all raw meal. Dishes are extremely sophisticated and the raw platters absolutely zip with different flavours and herbs. My main course was a lightly steamed potato stuffed with mushrooms in a sundried tomato sauce, which was, alas, not the most thrilling dish that I have consumed, although perhaps to a mid-detox palate it would taste absolutely heavenly. Vegetarian set lunch €14.50, set lunch with meat €17.50. 95 Rue de l'Aqueduc/Aqueductstraat, Brussels (Ixelles/Elsene), open for lunch and dinner Tuesday to Friday, dinner only on Saturdays, tel 02.537.87.87, www.tanclub.org